

Lessons from India's Partition

By Nasim Yousaf

The partition of India led to slaughter, rape, and countless atrocities in the region; it further resulted in the Kashmir issue and bitter rivalry between a nuclear Pakistan and India. The tragic episode provides a lesson for the world to learn from.

In Pakistan and India, the history of the freedom movement has been written under the influence of the All-India Muslim League (AIML) and Indian National Congress (INC) parties respectively, to which the British transferred power in 1947. According to the traditional narrative propagated by these two parties, partition was inevitable and the two parties were responsible for bringing freedom to British India and the creation of Pakistan and India as separate states. But historical documents strongly suggest that the leaders of both parties *did not* have the power to demolish British rule. In fact, the reality is that the leaders of the AIML and the INC were playing into the hands of the British rulers. Ultimately, partition has only produced harsh consequences and unending hostility within the region.



In order to understand why partition was ill-advised from the outset, one must first understand why Muslim League and Congress leaders, who were responsible for partition, ultimately contributed to British interests. During the years leading up to partition, the British were seeking to maintain their rule over India, and thus pursued a policy of Divide and Rule. In other words, they sought to perpetuate divisions amongst the Muslims and Hindus, so that the Muslims and Hindus would not be able to rise up against British rule. There are countless examples of the British pursuit of this policy. Rather than forming a united front to undermine the British, Muslim League and Congress leaders instead added fuel to the fire by legitimizing and inflating the political differences between the Muslims and Hindus, ultimately blowing the conflict out of proportion. It is not difficult to see why this policy was in the interests of the Muslim and Hindu leaders. At the time, the British were very powerful and had the ability to sideline any leader who did not fall in line with their agenda. Thus, it was incumbent upon Muslim League and Congress leaders to perpetuate the Muslim-Hindu conflict, or risk losing their own political careers.

Throughout his political endeavors, freedom fighter Allama Mashriqi repeatedly sought to expose the vested interests of the prevailing Indian leadership. Mashriqi could foresee that the Muslim and Hindu leaders' divisive words and actions were setting the stage for the partition of the nation. He recognized that partition would be devastating to the nation and would bring about everlasting hostility in the region. In a monumental press statement in early 1947, he categorically warned, "I see massacre of at least one million people." He also sent a telegram to Lord Mountbatten (Viceroy of India) "foreshadowing murder and ruin of at least ten million Indians..." Envisioning the serious repercussions of partition, Mashriqi worked tirelessly to bring about the liberation of a united India. This struggle almost cost him his life, and he was

stabbed and arrested in Delhi, where the AIML was holding a meeting at the Imperial Hotel (on June 09, 1947) to accept a truncated Pakistan.

With the partition of India, Mashriqi's dire warning came to fruition. Partition brought unthinkable tragedy, as at least one million Muslims, Hindus, and Sikhs were brutally killed and countless young Muslim and non-Muslim females were raped or abducted. Parents, children, and spouses witnessed the slaughter of loved ones and were forcefully separated. There are countless heartbreaking stories such as these that speak to the atrocities that befell innocent people as a result of the country's division; *these Muslim and non-Muslim civilians were the unfortunate victims* of the politics of the AIML and Congress (their deaths were not a *necessary sacrifice* for independence, as has been suggested by some writers and speakers). Beyond the direct human toll, partition also produced a host of other far-reaching consequences in the region, including the Kashmir conflict, four wars, countless border clashes, and the spread of terrorism in the region. Perhaps most importantly, a nation comprised of communities that had co-existed for centuries has now been transformed into two nuclear-armed hostile neighbors. The regional and global instability caused by partition has had immeasurable consequences, and the people of the two nations continue to suffer from these consequences even today.



It is clear then that the partition of India was one of the biggest blunders of the 20th century. Yet instead of condemning the policies of the political parties that actually created this partition, historians and writers have presented partition as an inevitable occurrence. They project AIML and Congress leaders as heroes, while ignoring the fact that their actions resulted in tremendous human tragedy and everlasting hostility within the region. Furthermore, writers neglect to mention that partition would not have occurred, had it not been in the interest of the ruling power at the time. While bolstering the pro-partition perspective of those in power, mainstream writers have simultaneously distorted the views of Mashriqi (and others who strongly favored a united India). The print and electronic media (including television) further contribute to this distortion, as they do not publish or allow discussion of facts that are contrary to the traditional narrative of partition. In both Pakistan and India, they promote the leaders of the AIML and Congress respectively. A lack of independent researchers and scholars in these countries has also contributed to the problem. It is no surprise then, that the true history of the nation is unknown to people of both countries. In fact, the history of both countries, as currently written, is biased and does not reflect reality.

Despite the false narrative that has been portrayed in books and the media, it is not too late to change the status quo. The people of Pakistan and India must learn from the errors of the past and stop endorsing partition, as it only leads to continuing hostility between the two nations; the concocted and exaggerated stories regarding the freedom movement must come to an end. History can still be restored through independent writing and thought; educational institutions must also be reformed to encourage new ideas and research. Ultimately, the people of Pakistan and India must strive not only for better relations, but also to unite the two countries.



The reunion of over a billion people in Pakistan and India would be an unprecedented action. By returning to Allama Mashriqi's selfless ideology and vision of a united India, we could undo the devastating effects of partition. The Kashmir issue would be resolved, the potential for nuclear war between the two neighboring countries would disappear, and the threat of terrorism could be eradicated jointly. Unification would thus finally bring much-needed political, social, and economic stability to the South Asian region, and have far-reaching benefits for the world at large.

Nasim Yousaf is a scholar and historian who has presented papers at U.S. conferences and written many articles and books. He has also contributed articles to the "Harvard Asia Quarterly" and the "World History Encyclopedia (USA)." His forthcoming book, "Mahatma Gandhi & My Grandfather, Allama Mashriqi," discusses the role of Mashriqi and Gandhi in the freedom movement, their political differences, and the true driving force behind the liberation of British India in 1947.

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